

Darkness

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"Titans, down!" Robin shouted. He should have known! Seven years with Batman, and he still falls for an ambush! The Titans were responding to reports that the Hive was causing trouble in this area of the city. Robin took cover and assessed the situation. There was a sniper on the top of a corner building. Aqualad was behind a parked car, and Wonder Girl was in the air behind a billboard. Kid Flash was nowhere to be seen, but Robin had sent him to the sniper.

The only one not under cover was Speedy. Robin had started to keep a special eye on the archer for a few weeks now. He had been acting strangely; not wanting to spend time with his friends in activities that normally he suggested, and he often inexplicably disappeared. And he would seem distant, like he was in a daze, and constantly zoning out. Robin remembered when he first suspected that something was wrong. They were training and Speedy missed his target not once, twice, but **three** times in a row--unheard of from the archer, even if he had been ill. And now he was wide open, running with almost a lazy gait, when Robin would expect him to already be under cover and marking his target.

Robin's attention went back to where he supposed the sniper to be. Thank God he seemed after only Titans--that he didn't seem interested in killing innocents. Suddenly he heard Wonder Girl's panicked cry, "Robin! Speedy's down!"

A second later the assault stopped, and another second saw Kid Flash next to Speedy. The team crowded around the fallen Titan, and, kneeling, Robin quickly assessed Speedy's wound. He had taken the hit

to his shoulder--not bad, but he wouldn't be shooting his bow for a while, and Robin thought it would hurt like hell.

"What happened?" Speedy asked, confused and lying on his back looking up at his teammates. "Why are you all looking at me like that?" To Robin's surprise, Speedy started to sit up with barely a wince.

"Speedy, you ok? I would think that would hurt a lot."

"What?" He looked at his shoulder in kind of a daze, "Oh it doesn't hurt bad. Must have just grazed me."

Robin looked suspiciously at this teammate. He knew that would wasn't a graze, but he simply looked up to the speedster and said, "Ok, Kid Flash, what happened up there?"

Expecting to be asked for a report, Kid Flash was ready, "I tied him up and melted his weapon. He was knocked out when I left him."

"Ok, good. Take Speedy to the ER, ok? Wonder Girl, Aqualad and I will catch up, and we can call the cops for that guy when we get there."

"Aw," Speedy whined, "Can't Wonder Chick take me?" Wonder Girl glared at him, and Kid Flash looked hurt. "No offense, Fleetfeet, but Wonder Babe smells better." Speedy gave Wonder Girl his best killer smile, and winked.

"No. That wound is worse than you're letting on, and I want you to the hospital as soon as possible." He left no room for further argument. "Let's go."

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It was the next day. Speedy had been released from the hospital and was back at the Titans' Lair. Robin had Speedy stay at the Lair because his guardian Green Arrow wasn't home--again. Speedy wanted to leave, but Robin had given orders to the others that he was to stay put, to the point that Speedy complained about being a prisoner. Robin sent the other three members on an errand. He wanted to talk to Speedy alone, and he thought the talk was long overdue.

"How're you doin', Roy?" Downcast, Roy shrugged, and, Robin noticed, seemed more bothered by his wounded shoulder than he had been before. "What's the matter? Your shoulder will heal."

"I dunno. I feel a little sick to my stomach--must have had bad hospital food. I've got to get out of this place. Cabin fever, I guess. Why won't you let me leave?"

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Robin shrugged and told a half-truth, "I want you well as soon as possible." Truth was he wanted to test his theory before he confronted Roy. Although Roy had been in the hospital only overnight, he was surprised that the doctors didn't catch what he suspected, so he was beginning to doubt himself. Roy was obviously in pain now, although that could just be the lack of painkillers he had received in the hospital. But with the nausea and his watering eyes, along with the slight shaking Robin noticed, Robin's confidence in his

suspensions was back. There was no possible precursor Dick realized, so he bowed his head and asked quietly, "Roy, are you taking drugs?"

Dick saw Roy tense up. Roy looked wide-eyed at his friend, looked away, and looked back. His initial expression of shock quickly turned defensive. "What? .. How did..? How? .. How dare you ask me that?"

Dick's own initial reaction was defensive, but he kept calm and explained, "It's hard to miss, Roy. You don't care about anything anymore, and when you took that bullet, you acted like it was a flesh wound when in fact it had gone into your shoulder." Dick felt the pit that had been in his stomach start to spread over him as fear mingled with anger. "And now look at you. Watering eyes, nausea, yawning, your irritable demeanor, which has been even worse than normal in the past couple weeks, and you're shaking. I think you're trying to get out so you can score another fix."

"How dare..! I'm not..! It's just stress, Dick! When I first got hit, I was probably in shock, and it's just cabin fever, I swear! And if you had a hole in your shoulder you'd probably be as sick as me!"

"Yeah, I probably would feel nauseous, that's true. But my eyes wouldn't be watering and I wouldn't be talking between sneezes and yawns."

"You're always against me! Always thinking I'm up to no good because I'm left alone to take care of myself! I can handle it without drugs!"

Dick raised his hands in a position of surrender. "Ok, Roy. Whatever you say. Sorry." But he wasn't really.

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Dick knew Roy was lying to him. He didn't want to know it, but he had seen too many addicts on the streets when he was out with Batman to miss the symptoms in his friend. He had stalked out of Roy's room at the Lair. He had been frustrated with the archer at the time, but now he felt badly about it. Now more than ever Roy needed a friend, even if he didn't know it himself, and Dick had just walked out.

He had talked to Roy with no luck. Logically, he wasn't surprised--that had been a textbook conversation he had had with his friend, but emotionally he was crushed. He wanted so badly to control the situation--to fix everything for his friend--but he didn't know how. Well, talking to Roy didn't help, and Dick didn't know what to do next, but he knew Bruce would, and Dick was waiting for him to come home from the office.

Like clockwork, Bruce poked his head into Dick's room and said, "How's it going, chum? Have your homework done?"

Standard lines. Giving the standard response, Dick said, "Yes, sir."

Bruce studied his ward and commented, "What's the matter, son? You look like you've lost your only friend."

"You're not that far off, Bruce. Could I talk to you?"

"Sure. Let me get changed, and I'll meet you in the study."

"Ok, thanks"

"No problem, chum."

**

When Bruce walked into his study, his ward was waiting for him. Only one look told Bruce that the weight of the world was resting on Dick's shoulders.

Bruce took a seat in his chair--Dick had left it open for him, sitting on the chair's ottoman. Noting Dick's proximity, Bruce looked a moment at the teen before starting quietly, "What is it, Dick?"

Dick took a moment, trying to word what he had to say. Finally after a moment and looking at the floor, he said, "I think Roy's using drugs."

Bruce had hoped that he'd never have to have this conversation with Dick. "What makes you think so?"

"He doesn't want to do anything anymore, and he's always so secretive. " Dick started to fidget with his hands until Bruce laid his hands on Dick's.

"Maybe he's found a new group of friends."

Grateful for the tactile contact, Dick explained, "Yeah, I thought of that, but I've been watching him for the last few weeks, and if you're looking for it, all the signs are there. Bruce, he even missed 3 shots in a row! I can't ever remember when he missed one, and those should have been easy for him. And when he got shot a few days ago, he should have been in terrible pain, but he started to get up like he had just been grazed. He seems to move more slowly than he ever did before--like he's always in a daze, and when I saw him today he was having withdrawal symptoms."

"Did you talk to him about it?"

"Yeah, he got defensive. Said it was stress. Bruce, it wasn't stress."

Bruce thought a moment. He squeezed Dick's hands, and drew his own back. "We need to tell Oliver."

"Bruce, no. Mr. Queen would kill him." Dick's voice took an edge, "I don't think he cares about Roy anyway. He leaves him alone for weeks at a time."

"We need to tell him, Dick. No matter our personal feelings about how he raises Roy, Oliver is still his legal guardian."

Resigned, Dick nodded. He knew that they would have to tell Oliver, but he didn't want to get Roy into trouble. He hoped though that

perhaps Roy would now get the help he needed.

**

Dick was waiting alone in the Titans' Lair hoping that Roy would come looking for him. He had gone home because Mr. Queen was expected home today. Although he frowned upon civilian clothes in the Lair, he was dressed in civvies because he wanted Roy to be talking to Dick, not Robin.

He wasn't waiting long before he heard a crash and Roy stormed into the common room. "Thanks a lot, Dick! I know you told Ollie that I'm using, and he kicked me out! I told you I don't have a problem!"

Although he had been waiting, Dick jumped at Roy's entrance into the Lair, and was shocked at the angry tear-filled words. Roy came right up to Dick, and Dick stood so that the teens' faces were inches apart from each other. He knew Mr. Queen would be hard on Roy, but he never dreamed that Roy would get kicked out, especially with his bandaged shoulder and slinged arm.

"I didn't tell Ollie!" Dick hurtfully objected, "I told Bruce! I didn't think you'd get kicked out, Roy!" His hurt tone turned angry, "And you do have a problem! Your attitude says it all!"

"Not everyone has such a great guardian, Dick! Ollie doesn't trust me like Bruce trusts you!" Dick thought that was an odd thing for Roy to say. After all, Mr Queen did leave Roy alone--didn't that imply trust? "Why couldn't you leave it alone! You're always trying to control things!"

Roy was right--he was always trying to control things--but until now, he had always succeeded. Still in the archer's face, Dick shot back, "You're sick, Roy! I couldn't let it go because I didn't want to lose you!"

"You didn't want to lose my friendship so you told on me? That doesn't make sense!"

Dick's anger was peaked, and he was shouting through unshed tears. "I 'm not talking friendship, Roy! I mean I don't want you to die! You *are* dying, Roy! I see it every night--you think I can't see it in you?! You're my family! And I've lost too much family! If I can stop your death, Roy, I'm sure as hell gonna try!"

Roy looked as though he had just been struck, and he backed away awkwardly until he could sit dazed in a chair. This time, Dick didn't think Roy's daze was because of the drugs. Of course Roy knew that Dick had lost his parents seven years ago. Telling Roy that Dick valued his life as much as he had valued his parents made Roy realize that the consequence of his actions affected not only him, but Dick too. As Dick suspected, Roy didn't care if he hurt himself, but he didn't want to hurt his friend, and Dick saw his friend's tears change from tears of anger to tears of desperation. "I'm sorry, Dick. I didn't think about you and the rest of the Titans. I'm so used to thinking no one cares."

In response to Roy's change of disposition, Dick felt his anger drain away and went to the chair next to Roy. He sat on the edge of the

chair and , elbows on knees, leaned towards Roy. He said, "All the Titans care, Roy. You're our brother. And I can tell you that Bruce cares. If you keep doing this, you'll hurt us all."

After a long thoughtful pause, Roy asked, "Do the other Titans know? Does Donna know?" Dick noticed the admittance of drug use and smiled to himself--Roy had just taken the first step.

"Not unless they figured it out on their own, and I don't think they have. We need to figure out what to do next. You can't stay here. I mean, of course you can stay here, but you need an adult's help."

"No, I don't. I've got it under control," Roy insisted.

"No. You don't, Roy. Try to step out and see what I see. Do you feel like yourself? Do you remember what feeling like yourself feels like? When you were on the reservation? Does anything excite you anymore? I can tell you that your eyes don't light up like they used to when Donna enters the room. What do you think?"

Roy looked away from Dick to an unseen point on the wall. "I guess. I can tell you I didn't like missing those 3 arrows a few weeks ago. I figured it was that I was just getting used to not feeling loved. Being left alone isn't all it's cracked up to be, ya know?" Roy looked back at Dick, and Dick could see unshed tears in his friend's eyes.

Dick laid a hand on Roy's good shoulder and squeezed gently. "Yeah, I know. We all know what it's like to be alone, Roy. And we all know that we don't like it. That's why the Titans were formed in the first place. You're never alone, Roy. When Ollie leaves you, come to the Lair, or come home with me. I know Bruce and Alfred would welcome you."

"But that's your home. Your guardian. Ollie's mine, and I don't want to give him up." Roy's voice got softer, "I just wish I could be sure the feeling was mutual."

Dick got up to kneel in front of his friend who was sitting on the edge of his own chair, and moved his hands to Roy's upper arms, careful of Roy's wound. He gently squeezed to make sure he had the archer's attention, and said, "Ollie loves you, Roy. I know he does. It's just that he doesn't know how to be a parent. And he's not as good at figuring it out as Bruce is. Not to mention that he doesn't have Alfred. Please. If Ollie won't help, let someone else help, Roy. You need the help of people who love you. And we do love you, Roy."

Roy nodded resignedly, looking into his lap. "Who though? Ollie doesn't want anything to do with me," Roy looked into his friend's caring eyes and looked away as his unshed tears became full-fledged tears. For what must be the millionth time in the past seven years, Dick thanked God that Bruce found him and cared enough to take him in. Dick was on the verge of tears himself, to see his friend in such emotional pain.

"What about Ms. Lance? She cares about you, Roy."

"Naw, she just feels sorry for me because Ollie leaves me alone so

much."

"That may be true, Roy, but she does care. I'm going to call her, ok?" After a moment of staring at the wall for so long that Dick thought Roy didn't hear the question, Roy looked back into Dick's eyes and nodded.

The phone was behind the archer, so Dick stood up and went to the phone, careful not to turn his back on Roy. As he moved, Roy lifted his eyes to follow him with eyes that showed defeat, but with a hint of hope. Dick knew it was psychological for the archer--Dick didn't want Roy to think even subconsciously that a literal turned back meant a figurative turned back. Dick also wanted to make sure Roy didn't leave. If he could have locked the door, he would have.

Dick dialed the number that Bruce had given him. They had already figured out that they might have to turn to Black Canary for help. Quickly a female voice answered, and he asked, "Ms. Lance, please?"

"Speaking"

"This is Dick Grayson. Could you come to the Titan's Lair, please? It's about Roy." Dick kept his eyes locked with Roy's.

"Roy? Why didn't you call Oliver?"

"Because..um..he kicked him out." Dick's expression became apologetic.

"Bastard." She had said that to herself. "What's this about, Dick?"

"I'd rather not say on the phone, ma'am."

Dinah sighed, "Ok, then could we meet at the JLA headquarters?"

"I'm sorry, I'd rather meet here. The situation is--delicate--and I'd rather not involve the rest of the JLA."

"Ok, Dick. How about Hal?"

Dick knew that Hal Jordon seemed to have a special interest in Roy and, covering the mouthpiece, mouthed, "Hal?" Roy nodded his approval, and Dick relayed it to Dinah.

"Ok, we'll be right over."

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He was helping. Thank God, he was helping. He didn't want to lose someone else. And not to something like this. Of course he had wanted to save his parents too, but he had finally come to realize that there was nothing he could have done. He knew his parents' lines had to have been cut during the performance because his father had always checked the rigging himself before every show. But to lose a family member--and Roy was family, even after all his obnoxious behavior and tantrums--to a killer that he fights every night to keep from strangers--Dick didn't know if he could ever live with that.

Roy started to sneeze uncontrollably and it had only been an hour since he had stormed into the Lair. He figured that in his anger, Roy must have come to the Lair right from Oliver's apartment and not had a chance to get another fix. Not good, Dick thought, But Dinah and Hal should be here any minute.

As if on cue, the bell that announced a visitor at the entrance sounded, and having sat next to Roy again, Dick buzzed them in without getting up.

A few minutes later, Dinah walked in with Hal directly behind her. Her voice held worry as she said, "What's up, Dick? Roy, what's wrong?" She and Hal took seats across from the teens and studied Roy with concern. They had known that he had been shot, but he was beginning to look sick again; he was sweating and looked like he had a cold; he was still sneezing and his eyes were starting to water again.

Roy gave Dick a pleading look through another sneeze, and Dick responded with a sympathetic expression and a tilt of his head in the adults' direction.

Roy looked to the floor, and mumbled too quietly for ears, "I'm using heroin." Dick heard him because he was sitting right next to him, and he felt tears well up. He had known Roy had a drug problem, but until this moment he hadn't known what type. Somehow hearing Roy say those words made Roy's addiction so much more real--as if before they were playing a game; stepping through the textbook motions.

After making Roy repeat his words, Dinah and Hal sat in shock for a moment. Finally, Dinah spoke, if not very eloquently, "What? ...How? ...How long?"

Roy shrugged, still looking downcast, and said, "I dunno. About 2 years ago I started smoking it, and about 4 months ago I started mainlining."

Dinah sighed. She should have paid more attention to Roy. She knew Oliver was neglecting him, and she didn't do anything. She should have. She asked, "What about before that? Did you ever smoke cigarettes or drink?"

Roy looked at Dick, who somehow provided support with simply a look, and then at the floor, "Yeah. I guess about three years ago I started drinking and got into smoking cigarettes."

God, he was only 13, Dinah, thought. "What..how did it start?"

Roy shrugged, "They guys in the band I was in introduced me to cigarettes and alcohol. I found the heroin on my own from when me and Ollie would break up drug rings."

"My God," Hal breathed. How could he have missed it? Granted he had been on a busy schedule, both as a pilot and as a member of the JLA, but still, how could he have missed the signs? Simple he thought, I didn't want to see the signs. I wanted to believe that Roy was a kid able to handle the problems thrown at him. On retrospect though, no one could handle those problems without a support network, and Roy's, Hal thought mournfully, was pretty weak.

Dinah let out a long sigh. She looked on the verge of tears--not a usual expression for her, Dick thought. "And Oliver threw you out?" Roy nodded. "I'm going to kill him." She sighed again. "Well, obviously we need to get you into detox. I have some contacts that could help us with that. I'm glad you told us, Roy." Dinah looked at Hal, and he nodded his agreement. "We're not all like Oliver. We'll be with you through this whole thing. It's going to be rough."

Roy nodded. He wanted to protest Dinah's assumption that he'd go into detox, but he knew she was right, so he simply said, "I know. Thanks. Actually, it's thanks to Dick. He's the one that forced it into the light."

But Dick needed no extra thanks. His friend accepting his help was all the thanks he needed.

End
file.